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RESTARTING ARMS CONTROL

By Joseph S. Nye, Jr.

The current disarray in strategic arms control may be traced to the failure of the Senate to ratify SALT II in 1979 and the electoral politics that followed in 1980. Subsequently, the bellicose declarations and neglect of arms control in the first year of the new administration helped foster antinuclear sentiment in Western Europe and a nuclear freeze movement at home. But the idea of a freeze is more a *cri de coeur* than a detailed program for arms control. The problem remains how to adjust the strategic arms control process to the post-détente period. Well before the 1980 election even sympathetic critics expressed concerns about the lengthy and cumbersome nature of the SALT process.

Critics on the right charged that the limits on strategic launchers rather than throw-weight failed to remove the threat posed by Soviet missiles armed with multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicle warheads. Critics on the left complained about inadequate reductions and the failure to make real budget savings in defense possible. Moreover, both the process of negotiation and of ratification of the treaty raised to an undue prominence the details of how the treaty would be verified. Thus the formal treaty process proved to be politically expensive. Not only did the requirement that the treaty be ratified by a two-thirds vote of the Senate set a high threshold in domestic politics, but the negotiating process was also difficult to coordinate within the U.S. government and with U.S. allies.

More important than the specific details of the treaty, however, has been the visibility and centrality of the formal treaty process. This high profile has meant that even when political leaders avoided tactical linkage, there was a

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flexibility of the informal approach is attractive, it also raises a number of problems. The blackboard is not clean, and it would be politically costly to erase it. The Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty is in force, and SALT II exists de facto. The public in the United States and in Western Europe would react badly to an actual termination of the SALT process. Moreover, the treaty and negotiating history of SALT include a number of transparency and communication features that may be as important as the clauses limiting numbers of launchers, warheads per launcher, and introduction of new missiles. Such features include definitions, non-interference with national surveillance, and the Standing Consultative Commission for discussions about possible violations.

If the United States couched its programs as an effort to regain nuclear superiority, they would tend to stimulate Soviet determination to respond in kind.

In addition, informal arms control procedures may be difficult to explain to the public, to Congress, and to the Soviets. It is hard to find unambiguous evidence of informally reciprocated restraint in central strategic systems. Ironically, one of the prime examples is the current de facto observance of the unratified SALT II treaty. And such an ambiguous process lends itself to worst-case analyses and support in public opinion for extreme interpretations of Soviet behavior and necessary U.S. reactions. Moreover, Congress likes treaties for the leverage they provide to the legislature over the executive branch. Finally, the Soviet Union appears committed to SALT.

Nuclear Stabilization Talks. A fifth approach incorporates the importance of maintaining transparency, communications, and predictability even in the absence of formal agreements but takes the history and existence of the formal comprehensive treaty approach into account. In this view, SALT or START would remain part of the process but as less central a feature. This approach places less of a political burden on SALT-START to maintain

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good overall U.S.-Soviet relations, while also insuring that the TAC dimensions of arms control could be pursued even if SALT-START became bogged down. In theory, it is wise to have as many policy instruments as one has policy objectives. The approach proposes a broad framework of nuclear stabilization talks (NST) with different instruments incorporated within it designed to meet different arms control objectives. In effect, the NST process would mean simultaneous pursuit of four major tracks: TAC talks, force structure discussions, limited agreements, and SALT-START.

First, crisis stability would be served by establishing a regular pattern of TAC talks. Such talks could be held at several levels. One aspect might include meetings between the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and his Soviet counterpart. These discussions would not seek formal agreement but could explore ambiguities in posture and doctrine as well as military perspectives on possible specific measures and agreements. The TAC talks might also explore confidence building measures and limited agreements on selected problems. Whatever the fate of SALT, efforts would be made to continue the transparency and communication features already attained such as the non-interference with surveillance agreement and Standing Consultative Commission meetings.

It might also be useful to discuss topics such as strategic doctrine or targeting of command centers even if no formal agreement were feasible or desirable. Existing confidence building measures like discussion of naval incidents, notification of exercises in Europe, and the hot line could be supplemented by new measures, including a ban on testing depressed trajectory launches of submarine missiles or of fractional orbital bombardment systems. The talks might discuss cooperative measures to deal with non-proliferation or Senators Sam Nunn (D.-Georgia) and Henry Jackson's (D.-Washington) idea of a crisis center to identify and deal with nuclear explosions by third countries.

Such measures would not profoundly affect the central strategic balance, but they would help enhance stability in its management. Transparency and communication will not change the nature of the strategic balance, but